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AMERICAN AND JAPANESE ATTITUDES ON BILATERAL RELATIONS: A CRISIS IN THE MAKING?

Summary

Although Japan contributed about $13 billion to support the allied coalition that fought in the Persian Gulf War, the nature and the timing of Tokyo's response to the crisis angered many in the United States. Conversely, the Bush administration's willingness to go to war and its call for support from Japan raised questions about Japan's foreign policy goals. Public grumbling on both sides of the Pacific resulted in renewed attention to the alliance's health.

While the gulf crisis undoubtedly had an impact on the way Japanese and Americans view each other, an erosion of mutual goodwill was becoming apparent at least five years ago. Some analysts have attributed the change to the strains resulting from economic competition between the two countries. Others have suggested that changing views of the economic, political and military aspects of U.S.-Japan relations actually reflect the tensions of a relationship in transition within a global system that also is undergoing transformation.

Public opinion data, however, do not necessarily reflect the views of the decisionmaking elite, which may be influenced by broader considerations than the current developments that often sway opinion polls. The elite and the media, in turn, have played, and will continue to play, important roles in shaping public attitudes. Some analysts maintain that the media, in particular, have affected a negative shift in public opinion through the sometimes sensational depiction of issues in bilateral relations.

"Bashing" from Both Sides on the Rise

The May 6 cover story of Fortune magazine, entitled "The Big Split," portrayed a U.S.-Japan alliance in trouble. "Bashing" on both sides of the Pacific is on the rise, the article suggested, creating a very problematic outlook for bilateral relations in the near future.[1]

For the past several years some Americans have chosen to vent their frustrations with the still-staggering bilateral trade imbalance and related competitiveness problems by laying the blame on Japanese business practices. Congress, in particular, has been the source of much anti-Japan rhetoric -- often called "Japan-bashing." A spate of books, articles, studies and other projects have sought further to make the case that Japan operates according to a different set of rules and, if allowed to go unchecked, poses an economic threat to the United States.[2]

As the media cover these analyses, the rhetoric over U.S.-Japanese relations heats up in what many see as a topic of interest primarily for Washington insiders, who include policymakers. A 1990 book by Pat Choate, formerly of TRW Inc., on the influence of foreign business and government interests through lobbyists in the United States was said, for example, to have been read from back to front as Washington readers scanned first the index, then the section(s) that cited them. Regardless of the impact of such books outside Washington, however, they do become subjects of congressional hearings and often legislation. A recent study on Japan for the Central Intelligence Agency, for example, was grist for a July hearing by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs (see JEI Report No. 28B, July 26, 1991).

Discussions on television and radio talks shows, news reports in the print media and hearings on Capitol Hill raise the awareness of the U.S.-Japan relationship throughout the country. The implications of economic competition may generate the most concern at the grass roots. But policymakers have a broader field of worry, since frustrations in the economic area spill over into bilateral defense relations.

For over 20 years American legislators have questioned the extent to which U.S. military protection has enabled Japan's phenomenal economic progress to occur. As trade irritations between the United States and Japan began to intensify in the 1980s, congressional criticism of Japan's defense role grew harsher, and legislators became more aggressive in trying to rectify perceived inequities. Tokyo was urged to use more of its wealth for defense so that the United States, in turn, could shift more defense monies toward regaining its

[1]Carla Rapoport, "The Big Split," Fortune, May 6, 1991, p. 44.

[2]Examples include: Pat Choate, Agents of Influence (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Andrew J. Dougherty, Japan 2000, a report prepared for the Central Intelligence Agency under the auspices of the Rochester Institute of Technology, February 1991; and Karel Van Wolferen, The Enigma of Japanese Power (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

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industrial competitiveness (see JEI Report No. 38A, October 6, 1989). Thus, when Iraq invaded Kuwait a year ago Japan's apparent unwillingness to come quickly to the aid of its allies -- through provision of money and/or personnel -- further appeared to bolster the view that Tokyo cares only for its economic self-interest (see JEI Report No. 6A, February 15, 1991).

Until recently Japanese policymakers for the most part quietly endured criticism like this. Tokyo typically responded in a very measured (some would say minimal) way to U.S. demands that it open its markets and create greater transparency in its business practices. In the defense area the Japanese government qualitatively upgraded its military capabilities according to mutually agreed upon self-defense goals and assumed ever-greater levels of host-nation support (see JEI Report No. 35A, September 14, 1990).

The Persian Gulf crisis may have shattered Tokyo's reserve or brought to the fore long-held resentments about being a U.S. whipping boy. The Japanese now are "talking back," according to Fortune writer Carla Rapoport, who cited their irritation with being blamed for U.S. economic failings. Among other matters many Japanese were offended that Tokyo's $13 billion or so in gulf-related assistance did not appear to count for much as far as the United States was concerned. They are "bristling with arrogance and self-confidence," Ms. Rapoport wrote, referring, among various findings, to a study of U.S.-Japan relations commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That study said that Japan's rise as an economic superpower had reawakened Japanese nationalism in the form of anti-Americanism: "The American people and policymakers seem to refuse to acknowledge the country's decline and need for improvement . . . [and] there is a growing feeling that further [trade] concessions to the U.S. are unnecessary."[3]

There was concern in some official quarters in Japan that the August 6 commemoration of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima to help end World War II would prompt displays of anti-American rhetoric. While this did not occur, events such as a one-day international antinuclear conference were a reminder to the global audience of the enduring nature of Japanese pacifism -- an aspect of contemporary Japan that some Japanese policymakers feel the United States and other Western allies do not accredit fairly in analyzing Tokyo's behavior during the gulf crisis.

Ms. Rapoport concluded that "the ground ahead of the U.S. and Japan on the trade and defense fronts will be the rockiest since the [Persian Gulf] war." Although the Hiroshima anniversary came and went without apparently fueling U.S. "bashing" in Japan, some observers of bilateral relations are worried that the 50th anniversary of Japan's December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor may unleash strong U.S. sentiments against Japan. In this regard, the results of a May poll by Nihon Keizai Shimbun are revealing. When American respondents were asked whether they recall Pearl Harbor when thinking of Japan, 49.7 percent said they did; 48.5 percent said no. When Japanese respondents were asked whether they recall Pearl Harbor when thinking of the United States, 55.2 percent said yes; 40.3 percent said no.

One way to interpret these results is that World War II still shapes perceptions of each other. For some people, war memories still aggravate the

[3]Rapoport, op. cit., p. 39.

adversarial nature of current economic relations. It is no wonder that President Bush, meeting with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu in Kennebunkport, Maine in mid-July, expressed his interest in finding out firsthand about Japanese attitudes toward the United States when he visits Japan in November.

The Value of Public Opinion Data

To get a sense of just how rocky the road may be in this post-gulf war period in U.S.-Japan relations, Mr. Bush's staff -- as well as anyone else with any sort of business or political interest in bilateral affairs -- no doubt will keep at least one eye trained on a variety of recent (and ongoing) surveys of public opinion. The decisionmaking elites of industrial democracies, comprised of government and business leaders, at least in theory develop policies and action plans that reflect the popular will. Thus, when a member of Congress lambastes Japan's apparent unwillingness to do little more than "write checks" to support the allies in expelling Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait or introduces legislation that seeks to redress Tokyo's allegedly unfair trading practices, he or she presumably is responding to constituent sentiments.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that decisionmakers' views may differ from those held by the general public. This divergence may serve to either moderate or sharpen certain policies. (Unemployed auto workers, for example, might support import restrictions on Japanese cars and other products, while the actual policy developed by the American decisionmaking elite is less protectionist.) As will be discussed later, business and political leaders as well as the media also can shape popular opinions to support a favored course of action. The public's views, in short, are susceptible to manipulation.

Public opinion surveys, thus, are not a definitive indicator of where relations are headed. Yet, neither can they be ignored. Policymakers and observers of U.S.-Japan relations typically regard polling data as a useful guidepost or a barometer that indicates areas of concern affecting the conduct of bilateral affairs.

Impact of the Gulf War on Public Opinions

Prior to Saddam Hussein's sending his army into Kuwait, one of the more striking aspects of Washington's relations with Tokyo had been the degree to which relations were perceived as friendly despite the many areas of tension. Interestingly, survey analysts have noted that even with the amount of attention given to "Japan-bashing" in the United States, overall sentiment here toward Japan has ranked consistently warmer than Japanese attitudes toward the United States (see JEI Report No. 9A, March 2, 1990). Polls taken prior to August 1990 reflected the most positive opinions among Americans toward Japan since the mid-1980s. The less than sanguine assessment of bilateral relations expressed by the Japanese, in contrast, tended to reflect the cumulative impact of anti-Japan diatribes in Congress and contentious trade negotiations, among other factors.[4]

[4]William Watts, Uneasy Eyes Across the Pacific (Washington, D.C.: Commission on U.S.-Japan Relations for the Twenty-First Century, September 1990), p. 3.

In one of a series of polls by the New York Times/CBS News[5] people were asked:

> How would you describe relations between Japan and the United States today? Would you describe them as very friendly, somewhat friendly, somewhat unfriendly, or very unfriendly?

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
United States						
Very friendly	23%	22%	13%	14%	17%	18%
Somewhat friendly	65	63	59	59	62	66
Somewhat unfriendly	6	7	17	14	10	10
Very unfriendly	1	1	2	3	2	2
Don't know	5	7	9	10	9	4
Japan						
Very friendly	5%	4%	1%	2%	11%	3%
Somewhat friendly	68	62	42	52	57	60
Somewhat unfriendly	20	26	48	40	25	33
Very unfriendly	1	3	7	3	4	3
Don't know	6	5	2	3	3	1

Polling done after the war presents mixed views, making it hard to determine the extent of the alleged deepening rift in bilateral relations. Polls conducted by Jiji Press over a 30-year period, for example, showed that the United States by far was the "most liked" of the 10 countries Japanese respondents were asked to rank in order of preference. The following responses show only slight variations for the United States as the country "most liked" over the past six years, even with the intrusion of the Persian Gulf War:[6]

> Of the following (10) countries, please choose three countries you like. (For comparison purposes, rankings for the United States, the Soviet Union and China are featured.)

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991*
United States	43%	42%	38%	41%	43%	44%	43%
China	23	21	21	20	11	9	11
Soviet Union	1	1	1	1	1	2	2

*Through June 1991.

A May 1991 survey by Nihon Keizai Shimbun, however, gave slightly different results. Japanese respondents ranked Canada (78.2 percent), the United

[5]New York Times/CBS News/Tokyo Broadcasting System poll, June 5-8, 1990 among Americans; May 31-June 6, 1990 among Japanese.

[6]Twelve-month averages of monthly polls by Jiji Press from January 1985 through June 1991.

Kingdom (73.7 percent) and France (73.5 percent) higher than the United States (71.1 percent) when asked to indicate what countries they liked. American respondents ranked Japan seventh (66.5 percent) behind Canada (94.1 percent), the United Kingdom (86.1 percent), Italy (84.2 percent), France (81.5 percent), Germany (81.5 percent) and Mexico (75.2 percent).

Responses to another question in Nikkei's May poll suggest that the Persian Gulf conflict may have begun to deplete the reservoir of goodwill each nation holds for the other. This appears particularly so from the U.S. side.

> What is your evaluation of the role played by the United States (Japan)?

United States	
Highly appreciate	4.7%
Rather appreciate	26.9
Don't appreciate very much	33.3
Don't appreciate at all	29.0
Can't say	6.2

Japan	
Highly appreciate	20.0%
Rather appreciate	41.2
Don't appreciate very much	29.8
Don't appreciate at all	5.7
Can't say	3.3

Perhaps one of the more telling indicators of how the gulf crisis affected mutual levels of trust was Nikkei's question concerning reliability. Prior to the Middle East conflict Americans were divided fairly evenly in their view of Japan as a reliable/unreliable ally (44.9 percent/44.7 percent). Japanese were more convinced of U.S. dependability; 57.5 percent felt the United States was a "reliable ally," 26.6 percent, unreliable. By May 1991 many more Americans felt that Japan was much less reliable than before the gulf war; Japanese respondents, too, appeared less convinced of the United States as a stalwart friend. The following question was posed:

> Is the U.S. (Japan) reliable now, or unreliable, when compared to before the gulf war?

United States	
More reliable than before	21.9%
No change from before	21.4
Less reliable than before	43.7
Can't say	13.0

Japan	
More reliable than before	15.8%
No change from before	42.3
Less reliable than before	34.7
Can't say	7.2

While the above presents a rather bleak outlook for alliance relations, it still may be too soon to know whether the level of trust between the two countries has been irreparably shaken. When Nikkei asked American and Japanese respondents about the outlook for bilateral relations, 62.5 percent of the Japanese thought that the two countries' relations would remain unchanged; 23.2 percent thought relations would worsen; 10 percent were optimistic about the future. Interestingly, American responses appeared more positive: 34.2 percent thought relations would improve; 39.7 percent felt relations would remain unchanged; 20.2 percent believed that relations would take a turn for the worse.

Judgments concerning reliability, in particular, may shift -- positively or negatively -- depending on bilateral and global developments. Tokyo's recent willingness to extend an additional Y70 billion (which works out to $518.5 million at Y135=$1.00 or $500 million at the Y140=$1.00 rate used by the government) to support peacekeeping activities in the Persian Gulf and Kurdish refugee relief, for example, evoked supportive comments from administration witnesses testifying before an early August House Ways and Means Committee hearing. These statements might begin to change perceptions at the American grass roots of Japan's apparent reluctance to support not only its longtime ally but to extend itself internationally. They also might begin to assuage Japanese who feel that the United States, in one Japanese official's words, "did not appreciate [Japan's] good-faith effort to do what it could in the face of the first major military challenge since World War II."[7]

The fact that more money was disbursed after Washington complained about a shortfall in Tokyo's January pledge of $9 billion to support the allied war effort (see JEI Report No. 20B, May 24, 1991) might not promote a favorable impression on decisionmakers from either side of the Pacific. Had Tokyo been unwilling to make up the shortfall, another round of mutual recriminations might have followed and further fueled negative feelings. The Japanese government's action represented a symbol of Japan's commitment; often symbols play a crucial role in shaping public views. If mutual trust is to be restored, both sides may have to undertake more initiatives that symbolize a desire for more cooperative relations.

Japan's Military Role and Bilateral Defense Relations

The crisis caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the issue of how Tokyo should support the coalition forces that were fighting in the Middle East forced Japan to grapple with one of the core tenets of its postwar foreign policy -- no military engagement abroad. Although Japan maintains armed forces for self-defense purposes, for 46 years its "peace constitution" has been interpreted as banning the overseas dispatch of military personnel. Japan's protracted and minimal (in allies' views) pledges of nonmilitary monetary assistance during the Persian Gulf War irked many coalition members. Moreover, Tokyo's unwillingess to dispatch support personnel to the Middle East led to charges that Japan was "hiding behind its constitution" rather than putting itself at risk with the rest of its allies.

[7]Taizo Watanabe, "Frictions in the United States-Japan Relationship: Past, Present and Future," speech before conference on Japanese and American Media: Coverage of Friction Between the Two Nations, April 29, 1991, Honolulu, Hawaii.

The difficulties the Japanese government encountered in responding to American and allied requests for both money and "presence" illustrated the deep-seated nature of Japanese pacifistic sentiments as well as Tokyo's lack of a coherent vision of its global role (see JEI Report No. 6A, February 15, 1991). In an effort to respond to allied requests for a Japanese "presence" in the Middle East after Kuwait was occupied, Prime Minister Kaifu last fall proposed legislation that would have authorized Tokyo to establish a 1,000-member "peace cooperation team" composed of both civilians and Self-Defense Forces personnel. In November 1990 he was forced to withdraw the bill from the Diet due to the strong opposition it encountered at home as well as in Southeast Asia. A Nikkei poll conducted at that time revealed that 48.5 percent of those questioned opposed the dispatch of SDF members under any conditions, while 28.4 percent believed "unarmed troops" could be sent abroad. Only 23.1 percent favored Mr. Kaifu's proposal.

As the Middle East conflict escalated and allied pressures intensified for Japan to assume the responsibilities attendant on a global economic power, the polls also shifted, perhaps indicating an evolution of Japanese views on their country's role in the world. When the air war broke out in the Persian Gulf in mid-January, Tokyo came forward with support of $9 billion, which was on top of previous pledges totaling $4 billion. Mr. Kaifu's government also announced that it would take the unprecedented step of dispatching military aircraft to help evacuate refugees from the war-torn region.

A subsequent Kyodo News Service poll indicated that, unlike their reaction to the peace team plan two months earlier, Japanese at the grass roots were more supportive of involvement along these lines; 70 percent favored the $9 billion contribution and 56 percent supported the government's proposed use of SDF equipment and personnel for refugee evacuation purposes.[8] A NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corp.) survey in late February also found that 71 percent of the respondents favored the dispatch of noncombatant personnel as well as financial assistance as appropriate ways in which Japan could respond to United Nations' requests for gulf war-related support.[9]

Two months later the public mood had changed so much that Tokyo was able to launch with minimal fuss its first overseas military mission since World War II; four Maritime Self-Defense Force minesweepers and two support vessels set sail in late April to assist with postwar cleanup of the mine-ridden Persian Gulf (see JEI Report No. 17B, May 3, 1991). Granted, this action was taken after the hostilities had ended, but it was significant, nevertheless, when compared to Tokyo's near paralysis the previous fall in the face of public outcry. According to Foreign Ministry sources, one poll showed that 60 percent of the Japanese questioned either actively favored the dispatch of the minesweepers to assist with mop-up operations or agreed that Japan had no choice but to send them.[10]

[8]Larry A. Niksch and Robert G. Sutter, "Japan's Response to the Persian Gulf Crisis: Implications for U.S.-Japan Relations," CRS Report for Congress, May 23, 1991, p. 20.

[9]NHK conducted a telephone survey February 23, 1991 of 1,800 Japanese men and women, aged 20 years and over.

[10]Watanabe, op. cit.

Mr. Kaifu plans to consider a new proposal during the current extraordinary Diet session that would allow for a SDF role in United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping missions. Unlike last November, the proposal now enjoys the full support of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and two of the opposition parties. This reversal of opinion may represent the public's growing awareness that Japan's postwar foreign policy requires redefinition.

There is no recent polling data covering Americans' views specifically on Japan's defense role. Surveys from before the Middle East conflict, however, suggest that both publics believe each side generally benefits from the bilateral security treaty. Consider the following Louis Harris/Asahi Shimbun poll done in April-May 1990:

> All in all, do you think the United States (Japan) benefits from the bilateral security treaty?

United States	
Benefits	54%
Does not benefit	36
Don't know	10
Japan	
Benefits	48%
Does not benefit	23
Don't know	29

As early as November 1989, however, there were indications that the Japanese public (52 percent in a Harris survey) favored more independence from the United States in both defense and foreign policy. Two surveys done in April-May 1990 by Harris/Asahi and the Wall Street Journal/Nikkei confirmed this trend and showed that Americans, too, appeared to favor a more autonomous ally.[11]

> Do you think Japan should continue to depend on the U.S. military for conventional and nuclear protection or should Japan build its own independent military system?

United States	
Continue dependence	22%
Build own independent system	71
Neither	3
Don't know	4
Japan	
Continue dependence	31%
Build own independent system	40
Neither	18
Don't know	11

[11] Watts, op. cit., p. 4.

Do you think Japan should or should not stake out a foreign policy that is independent of the United States?

United States	
Should	50%
Should not	36
Don't know	14
Japan	
Should	44%
Should not	17
Don't know	39

In one sense these survey results do not seem to explain why Tokyo appeared to flounder in responding to the Middle East crisis. Perhaps many Japanese, like at least a plurality of people in other industrialized democracies, feel it is imperative that their country provide for and maintain its own self-defense capability. But building an independent system and dispatching personnel to a foreign conflict area are two separate issues. The former may not be viewed as being in conflict with Japan's constitutional constraints; the latter apparently was. Similarly, while many Japanese may support the idea of a more autonomous foreign policy, the protracted and contentious process that characterized Tokyo's decisionmaking on the gulf crisis would appear to indicate that little work has gone into conceptualizing a new diplomatic mission among decisionmakers, let alone at the grass roots.

As will be discussed later, the gap between public views and actual policy as reflected in these polls may be indicative of the influence of decisionmaking elites. The fact that Tokyo has not realized much progress in developing an independent military system is because defense policymakers in Japan as well as the United States oppose that trend. In the same vein Tokyo's efforts to pursue a more independent diplomacy have not always been welcomed in some Washington quarters; Japan's decision at the July 1990 summit of the seven major industrial democracies to resume economic assistance to China is a case is point (see JEI Report No. 27B, July 13, 1990). While citizens in both countries may favor a more autonomous Japan, statements by officials of each country indicate that the two governments would prefer a more gradual approach for rethinking Japan's postwar foreign policy and reinterpreting its constitutional limits.

Economic Relations: Japan as the "Critical Threat" to U.S. Interests

Japan's apparent unwillingness to contribute "sweat," much less blood or lives, to help its allies in the Persian Gulf crisis generated negative feelings in the United States. Fanning those sentiments was the manner in which Tokyo pledged monetary support. Americans saw the financial backing as something that was wholly within Tokyo's constitutional parameters and economic wherewithal, even if they did not entirely understand the limitations on personnel support. Offsetting the significant sums pledged was the impression that pressure from Washington was necessary to get financial support from Japan. This left a strong view of a Japan that is stingy with its vast economic wealth, wealth associated with an enormous trade surplus with the United States and most other developed countries. Many Americans and people in other allied countries were offended that Tokyo appeared unwilling to draw from its well to help

resolve an international crisis -- particularly one in which Japan was seen as having a substantial stake because of its 70 percent dependency on Middle East oil.

A Gallup, Inc. poll of the public and the decisionmaking elites during the January-March 1991 period (after Tokyo came forward with its additional $9 billion pledge) found that 70 percent of the decisionmakers (a 20 percentage point increase over last year) and 49 percent of the public thought that Japan does not play an international role commensurate with its economic strength.

Japan's economic strength, much more than the political exercise of its influence, tended to dominate public opinion polls prior to the gulf crisis. The tensions generated by a chronic bilateral trade imbalance and Japan's growing economic power typically have been the major focus of attention. The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations' 1991 survey of American public opinion on U.S. foreign policy revealed, for example, that both the public (60 percent) and the decisionmaking elites (63 percent) regarded the economic power of Japan as a critical threat to the United States in the next 10 years. This assessment, remarkable for the nearly identical perceptions among the public and the decisionmaking elites, far surpassed the perceived threat posed by Soviet military power (33 percent of the public and 20 percent of the decisionmakers).

Even with last year's conclusion of the contentious Structural Impediments Initiative talks (see JEI Report No. 26B, July 6, 1990) and the resolution of fractious disputes concerning trade in certain product areas, the Chicago group's survey found that 71 percent of the public and 78 percent of the decisionmakers polled believed that Japan practices unfair trade with the United States. A July 1990 poll of American, Japanese and European business executives done by Louis Harris/NHK/Business Week confirmed these sentiments and, interestingly, revealed that those who were polled in Japan concur that it is incumbent on their government to open markets there.[12]

As an increasingly powerful economic force, Japan should take what steps internationally to foster global economic prosperity?

	United States	Europe	Japan
Open its domestic markets	63%	65%	76%
Work toward promoting free trade	58	43	71
Open its capital markets	41	39	29
Increase aid to developing countries	34	39	58
Transfer its technology abroad	27	29	54

The business community's view that Japan does not trade fairly appears to have intensified in the wake of the gulf war. A report released in early August by the Japan Economic Foundation, an organization affiliated with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, included the results of an April-May

[12]Watts, op. cit., p. 13.

1991 poll of about 500 American politicians, business leaders, academics and trade union officials. The report said that 85.3 percent of the respondents felt that Japan's trading practices are unfair; 65.7 percent called on Japan to open its markets. In addition, 24.5 percent of the people questioned called for retaliatory action to pressure Japan to open its markets, a 6.2 percentage point increase over the foundation's 1990 findings. Only 29.2 percent of the decisionmaking elites surveyed urged U.S. companies to boost competitiveness, perhaps a reflection of American policymakers' apparent inability or unwillingness to enact laws with sometimes painful consequences or to implement policies that would improve U.S. productivity.

When it comes to protecting domestic industries, however, a June 1990 poll by the New York Times/CBS News/Tokyo Broadcasting System revealed that Americans may have a double standard; they appear to favor protection of certain U.S. industries but are critical of similar behavior by Japan.[13]

> Which of the following statements comes closer to your opinion -- (1) trade restrictions are necessary to protect domestic industries; or (2) free trade must be allowed, even if domestic industries are hurt by foreign competition?

	May 1988	June 1989	June 1990
United States			
Restrictions necessary	51%	54%	56%
Allow free trade	39	36	34
Don't know	10	10	10
Japan			
Restrictions necessary	57%	62%	59%
Allow free trade	40	35	34
Don't know	4	3	7

Japanese direct investment in the United States, which, until moderating last year, had grown at a rate of 45 percent-plus over the 1987-89 period, also has sparked angry reactions in this country. There is a concern that the control that Japanese investors have over U.S. fixed and financial assets has enabled Japanese companies to gain too much influence in this country. Among the more controversial purchases have been Sony Corp.'s buyout of Columbia Pictures Entertainment Inc., Mitsubishi Estate Co., Ltd.'s purchase of a stake in a group that owns part of Rockefeller Center and Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd.'s purchase of MCA Inc. Cries that America is being "bought" by the Japanese, in turn, have prompted American lawmakers to push legislation that would limit foreign investment or prohibit it in certain areas (see JEI Report No. 34A, August 31, 1990).

While post-gulf war polling data on American grass roots attitudes are not readily available, previous surveys indicate a divergence of views between the public and the decisionmaking elites. A poll taken by the Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm of Smick-Medley & Associates in 1988, for example, found

[13]Watts, op. cit., p. 14.

that while 78 percent of the ordinary citizens surveyed felt that foreign investment should be limited, only 13 percent of the decisionmakers questioned shared that view. Moreover, in contrast to the 40 percent of the mass sample who would support legislation to prohibit further foreign investment in U.S. businesses and real estate, only 1 percent of the public officials polled favored such a measure.

A May 1990 poll by the Wall Street Journal/Nikkei found that the average American's concerns about the level of Japanese investment in the United States had not lessened: 69 percent said the amount of Japanese investment in this country was "too much;" 23 percent said the amount was "about right."[14] The Gallup organization's January-March 1991 survey of decisionmaking elites revealed that even Japan's handling of the gulf crisis had not measurably changed policymakers' opinion that Japanese direct investment should not be curbed; 70 percent stated that an increase in Japanese direct investment in this country would benefit the United States.

Although concerned about the nature and the extent of Japanese ownership of U.S. assets -- and angry and disappointed that Japan did not appear more willing to support the allies during the Middle East crisis -- the American public continues its love affair with Japanese products. A post-gulf war USA Today poll revealed that 42 percent of the Americans surveyed felt that the gulf war would have no effect on their purchase of Japanese goods; 31 percent said they would be less likely to buy Japanese products; 22 percent indicated they always buy American-made products.

The May 1991 Nikkei poll also indicated that Japan's response to the Middle East crisis had not affected Americans' image of Japanese products: 42 percent said they thought Japanese products were "rather good;" 31.5 percent found them "very good;" only 23.7 percent said they thought Japanese products were "ordinary" or "not very good." The same poll revealed that 89.5 percent of the American respondents currently were using Japanese products or had used them before.

Japanese responses to the Nikkei survey may reveal the attitudinal barriers U.S. manufacturers of consumer products face in trying to crack the Japanese market. In terms of image 71.7 percent of Japanese respondents said that American products were "ordinary," "not very good" or "not good;" only 18.2 percent said they were "very good" or "rather good." Forty-six percent of the Japanese polled indicated that they had not used American products before; 38.4 percent said they were using them now or had used them before.

Media Influence: Reflecting Opinion or Shaping It?

As mentioned above, public opinion is not formed in a vacuum. Decisionmaking elites, such as heads of government or influential lawmakers, can shape the popular view to support their policies. The media also can affect how the people of each country view the other. For example, in 1987 after it had been revealed that Toshiba Machine Co., Ltd. sold sophisticated machine tools to the Soviet Union in violation of Japanese export control laws, a junior member of Congress from Maryland, Helen Bentley (R), and three of her colleagues hammered

[14]Watts, op. cit., p. 14.

a Toshiba radio on the steps of the Capitol. This episode, which received some coverage in the U.S. media -- and was derided "inside the beltway" as overly dramatic -- was broadcast repeatedly in Japan. Similarly, Cable News Network's coverage of the Persian Gulf War included a clip of Japanese politicians anxiously debating in the Diet how Japan should respond to this crisis while outside Tokyo shops sold Saddam Hussein souvenirs.

Both of these treatments evoke strong emotions in the viewing audience and create powerful images. Is the media guilty of fomenting Japan- and America-bashing? This was the subject that Japanese and American correspondents sought to tackle during a spring conference in Hawaii sponsored by the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs and the Dentsu Institute for Human Studies. According to a survey of the 52 American, Japanese and other Western journalists who attended the conference, the majority felt that adversarial-type reporting and commentary by the news media in both countries will continue to strain already uneasy bilateral relations.[15]

Robert Hewett of the East-West Center, who coordinated the survey, pointed out that both American and Japanese correspondents, in significant numbers, placed the main responsibility on editors back home for the "emotional war of words." Some of the journalists were critical of their editors for "overdramatizing and overdrawing" what is really happening. One Japanese writer maintained that most Japanese editors want stories on controversy or sensational events; they want to focus on "what's wrong with America" and are not interested in "what works in America," he said. The journalists agreed, however, that while the nature of news coverage has heightened tensions in bilateral relations, the stories reflect, but do not cause, bitter disputes.[16]

These views are shared by some members of the Washington policymaking community, who contend that, on U.S.-Japan issues in particular, the media easily can be manipulated into giving prominence to a point of view that does not necessarily reflect mainstream thinking. Rep. Bentley and Rep. Byron Dorgan (D, N.D.) have been quoted by the media more often than is typical for a junior legislator, not because they are experts on Japan or articulate widely held views but because they are such harsh critics. Insofar as coverage of them is disproportionate, this sends an inaccurate signal to the Japanese public and may skew some Americans' views of Japanese behavior.

While many journalists and policymakers in both countries appear aware of the flaws in coverage, there was not a clear consensus at the Hawaii conference on whether public opinion is influenced by skewed reporting or editorial decisions. Gary Langer, an ABC News polling analyst, argued that coverage of Japan has not changed American opinion, citing a 65 percent approval rating of Japan in March 1991 as compared with 62 percent last year. "If you asked people if they thought less of Japan because of its response in the gulf, they would say yes, but just because people say they're annoyed at someone doesn't mean they don't like them anymore," he reportedly stated. He argued that it is not

[15]"Correspondents Give Their Views on Japan-U.S. News Coverage," a survey for discussion at conference on Japanese and American Media: Coverage of Friction Between the Two Nations, April 28-May 1, 1991, Honolulu, Hawaii.

[16]Ibid.

the coverage, but the events themselves, that change public opinion.[17] Cokie Roberts, an ABC News commentator, disagreed on the importance of media-conjured imagery and symbolism. During the Middle East war "one picture of Japanese medics saving one American soldier or one Kurdish baby would have made an incredible impact, more than any number of billions of dollars," she reportedly emphasized.[18] In terms of improving the quality of coverage, many of the conference participants said that increased study of language, history and culture plus more reporting on aspects of the latter two areas, which often shape current bilateral misunderstandings, would be helpful.

Outlook for Bilateral Relations

Do the opinion polls indicate that U.S.-Japan relations are headed for a crisis? While Japan's response to the Persian Gulf War has interjected additional strains into already tense relations, a permanent rift is unlikely. Decisionmaking elites -- at least on the U.S. side -- no doubt will work to ensure that the alliance hangs together, despite possible calls from the grass roots for retaliatory economic measures or a sharp change in bilateral defense relations. The United States and Japan are the world's two largest economies, whose interactions have ripple effects throughout the global economic system. In addition, they share a democratic political tradition and defense relationship that both sides recognize as important for ensuring stability in the Asian Pacific region. Using the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations' 1991 survey as a barometer of this commitment, 95 percent of the American decisionmaking elites polled believed that the United States has a "vital interest" in Japan; 79 percent of the U.S. public shared this assessment.

Some analysts have proposed that the increased negativity reflected in recent polls actually is indicative of the tensions and the frustrations inherent in a relationship that is undergoing transition as the Cold War order changes. It behooves both countries, this argument goes, to manage this transition in a manner that continues to provide stability in the Asian arena as well as economic prosperity to the world (see JEI Report No. 9A, March 2, 1990).

Ronald Morse of the Economic Strategy Institute concurs that the apparent resentment actually masks stronger undercurrents of bilateral cooperation. "The perception [in the United States] of Japan as a menace resulted largely from the distorted economic policy environment of the 1980s," he maintains. "[During the post-gulf war period] Japan's relations with the United States will become more open (transparent) and less politically charged, and the results of microeconomic convergence and structural adjustments from the 1980s will begin to have an impact [leading to improved relations]."[19]

Others have suggested that the shift in the public mood will begin to weigh on future policy. American policymakers, in particular, may feel compelled to develop a differentiated policy toward Japan. While Washington would

[17]Dorian Benkoil, "Better Misunderstood Than Ignored," Business Tokyo, August 1991, p. 41.

[18]Ibid., p. 41.

[19]Ronald A. Morse, "U.S.-Japan Relations: The Case for Optimism," Sekai Shuho, January 1-8, 1991.

continue to foster areas of close, mutually beneficial cooperation, the relationship would not be immune from forceful responses in cases where Japan's practices are seen as undercutting U.S. interests.[20]

Those who are predicting that U.S.-Japan relations are headed down a rocky road may be right. But given the economic and political values the two countries share, there still is enough of a reservoir of goodwill between them to ensure that relations do not veer off the road.

[20]Robert G. Sutter, "Japanese Government Cooperation With The United States: U.S. Officials' Perspectives," CRS Report for Congress, April 24, 1990, p. 23.

For further information, contact Barbara Wanner.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Japan Economic Institute.

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